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SUBJECT: LABOR ANALYSIS: UNIONS FIGHT FOR SURVIVAL (PART 1  
OF 2)

REF: A. HARARE 246  
[B.](#) HARARE 232  
[C.](#) HARARE 207

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (U) This is the first of two cables assessing labor in Zimbabwe. Part one examines the history of the labor movement and the challenges facing unions. Part two examines the internal political struggles within the labor movement and its continued relationship with the MDC leadership.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Our overall assessment is that the labor movement in Zimbabwe is struggling to survive. Low formal employment and worthless Zimbabwe dollar-denominated salaries have almost completely eroded revenue from membership dues, thereby undermining unions' ability to represent worker needs. We found this to be true across all organized labor sectors. The labor movement is also threatened by a second front opened by ZANU-PF. So-called "splinter unions," created by ZANU-PF to undermine traditional representative unions, continue to have a significant impact in rural areas as they collect forced donations, promote farm invasions, and are represented in negotiations with government. The MDC has been supportive of labor, but has been criticized for not executing on promises to pay workers a living, foreign-currency-based wage. While recognizing government's constraints, labor is looking to the MDC to deliver on salaries, as well as on other labor issues. END SUMMARY.

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Background: ZCTU vs. ZFTU vs. Independents  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) In an effort to understand the current status of the labor movement, between March 17 and 26 we spoke with leaders of six different labor unions as well as the umbrella

labor organization, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). All but one of these unions are formally affiliated with the ZCTU. Meetings were held with: Gertrude Hambira, Secretary General of the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ); Raymond Majongwe, Secretary General of the Progressive Teachers Union of Zimbabwe (PTUZ); Matthew Takaona, President of the Zimbabwe Union of Journalists (ZUJ); Wellington Likukuma, General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Banks and Allied Workers Union (ZIBAWU); Sophiso Ndlovu, Chief Executive Officer and Dr. Tshabalala of the Zimbabwe Teachers' Association (ZIMTA); and Tonderai Kanengoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU). We also spoke with Wellington Chibebe, Secretary General of ZCTU and Lucia Matibenga, ZCTU's First Vice President and Secretary General of the Commercial Workers Union of Zimbabwe.

14. (SBU) For decades, labor politics were subject to the whims and abuses of single-party rule. According to respected labor economist Godfrey Kanyenze, throughout the colonial and Rhodesian periods, unions were severely restricted and union leaders were routinely harassed. Colonial and Rhodesian laws dictated that union funds could not be used for political purposes, trade unionists could not affiliate with any political party, and donations from outside organizations had to be approved by the Minister of Labor. During the 1960s and 1970s, trade unionism and political activism were nearly indistinguishable, leading to many arrests of union leaders. This historical background is relevant because the Zimbabwean government (GOZ), beginning

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in the mid-1990s, adopted similar tactics for dealing with labor unions.

15. (SBU) In Zimbabwe there are two large organizations that claim to represent trade unions, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU). ZCTU is the more respected and legitimate of the two organizations by virtue of its large membership and international recognition, via its affiliations with the International Labor Organization and other international labor movements, including the AFL-CIO. ZCTU was created after Zimbabwean independence in 1981. ZCTU was formed through the consolidation of at least six different trade unions, and was led by ZANU-PF stalwarts for its first five years; during its first year it was led by Robert Mugabe's late brother Albert. In 1985, following a series of corruption allegations involving ZCTU leaders, an independent leadership drawn from larger and more professional unions was elected. When ZCTU resisted the merger of ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU in 1987, the rift between it and government grew wider. Finally, as governance deteriorated in the 1990s, ZCTU evolved into a standard-bearer for alternative governance. Morgan Tsvangirai, who served as ZCTU's Secretary General between 1989 and 2000, was at the forefront of this profound redirection. When ZCTU and 40 other civil society groups spearheaded the creation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, much of the MDC's top leadership came from ZCTU. Now Zimbabwe's Prime Minister, Tsvangirai maintains close -- although periodically strained -- ties with ZCTU.

16. (SBU) Given ZCTU's growing role as an effective opposition force, ZANU-PF sought in 1997 to dilute ZCTU's strength by creating an alternative union movement, the ZFTU. This coincided with ZCTU's leadership of the first nationwide strikes in Zimbabwe since the 1940s. ZFTU remained fairly quiet until 2001 when it became active in helping war veterans execute farm invasions. One of ZFTU's primary leaders in various capacities was feared war veteran Joseph Chinotimba, who led the farm invasions in 2000. The ZFTU president is currently Alfred Makwarimba, a ZANU-PF loyalist who served as ZCTU's president in the early 1980s. ZFTU's current secretary general is now Kennias Shamuyarira.

¶7. (SBU) ZFTU is widely recognized as illegitimate, as it has no real membership. In order for a union to gain legal recognition, it must be approved by the Ministry of Labor which bases its decision on a verifiable membership base, which the majority of ZFTU affiliates cannot muster. ZFTU has a long history of coercing workers to join its movement. In 2002, Chinotimba admitted that ZFTU was forcing workers to join ZFTU. He further told the independent press, "if (workers) want to remain with the ZCTU then they should go to other countries and not stay in Zimbabwe." Despite its lack of legitimate membership, ZFTU is frequently quoted in the government-sponsored press supporting ZANU-PF policies. For instance, in May 2008, the state-owned newspaper, the Herald, ran an article in which Shamuyarira accused ZCTU ally, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (COSATU), of "being used by British imperialists... to demonize Zimbabwe." On Workers' Day (May 1), police often grant ZFTU permission to hold rallies at the best and largest venues, relegating ZCTU's more popular rallies to less prominent locations.

¶8. (SBU) Perhaps the only successful independent union has been the Zimbabwe National Teachers' Association (ZIMTA). However, ZIMTA Chief Executive Officer Sophiso Ndlovu told us on March 24 that they applied to join ZCTU in November 2008. Despite the benefits of remaining independent, such as

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resisting charges of being aligned with either the MDC or ZANU-PF, they seek to benefit from the international assistance ZCTU receives and benefit from ZCTU's negotiating clout.

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Dollarization Has Hurt Unions and Political Optimism is Fading  
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¶9. (SBU) Without exception, union leaders lamented the continued economic hardships and their impact on union survival. Unions rely primarily on member dues for their income, drawing approximately one percent of gross salary directly from member paychecks. When the Zimbabwean dollar was still widely used, hyperinflation ate into profits, forcing unions to cut back on services and seek outside funding. Dollarization, while eliminating hyperinflation, has actually cut further into member dues. While many private companies have started paying employees in U.S. dollars, this is not always via salary payments. Dollar allowances, such as those paid to all civil servants, and other benefits, such as food packs that supplement salaries, cannot be drawn upon for union dues. Teachers' unions are acutely suffering, since civil servant salaries continue to be paid in the defunct Zimbabwe dollar. ZIMTA and PTUZ both rely heavily on outside funding from international donors and labor movements.

¶10. (SBU) Initial teacher optimism over the MDC's entrance into government began fading as the new GOZ made it clear that they would not be able to pay teacher salaries in forex for the foreseeable future, and teachers would have to rely solely on the US\$100 monthly allowances granted to all civil servants. Consequently, ZIMTA leaders told us on March 23 that both the organization and their constituents are struggling to make ends meet. ZIMTA is relying on grants from international education labor groups such as the American Federation of Teachers, which made a US\$10,000 donation to ZIMTA last year. ZIMTA was now feeling pressure from its members because, at the behest of MDC officials and on the basis that they would be paid in hard currency, it had called for all teachers to return to work in February. ZIMTA official Sophiso Ndlovu said that this pressure was building and if teachers were not paid a livable wage by April, ZIMTA would call for a strike at their union conference at the end of that month, repeating similar statements by PTUZ's Majongwe in our March 18 meeting (Ref A).

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No Workers, No Members, No Dues  
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¶11. (SBU) As the economy and formal employment have plummeted, union membership has shrunk dramatically. The TGWU, for instance, is composed of bus drivers, large truck drivers, transport boat captains, and taxi drivers. TGWU Deputy Secretary General Kanengoni estimates membership now totals 10,000, down from over 30,000 in 2005. ZIBAWU totals 10,000, down from over 30,000 in 2005. ZIBAWU Secretary General Likukuma told us that his union has not engaged in any recruiting activity for 18 months due to a lack of union revenue; its membership totals just 4,700, down from 10,000 members. Likukuma dejectedly told us that ZIBAWU survived hyperinflation, but now suffers from the lack of salary-based dues as workers are paid in-kind or with allowances. ZIMTA membership has dropped by 20 percent in just four years.

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Wages: "You pretend to pay us and we'll pretend to work."

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¶12. (SBU) ZCTU Secretary General Chibebe explained that ZCTU will insist on members being paid a livable wage in foreign currency; these demands have been criticized as unrealistic (Ref B). Recently, ZCTU called for a minimum wage of US\$454, equivalent to the estimated poverty datum line for February. Chibebe conceded that the figure will be reviewed downward in light of falling prices, and estimated the general minimum wage may settle between US\$250 and US\$350. He offered that ZCTU is willing to give government and industry until June 2009 to pay the minimum wage. However, no union is prepared to accept solely the government's US\$100 allowance.

¶13. (SBU) According to Kanyenze, current wages -- generally just allowances -- do not motivate workers. Across the economy, people go to work, but aren't necessarily productive. Symptomatic of this is that for years, ZCTU efforts to call effective strikes have failed, largely because employees go to work to make personal use of work infrastructure, such as the phone or internet, or because free transport into town is provided. Also, in the agricultural sector, low wages have contributed to a labor shortage, as potential workers decide to take their chances panning for gold or border jumping for greater economic opportunity.

¶14. (SBU) When we shared the opinion of an IMF assessment team that Zimbabwean workers needed to adjust their expectations due to current economic realities, Chibebe emphatically rejected the notion that Zimbabwe is a poor country. He said that the first point of entry to stabilizing the economy should not be low salaries and "slave labor." He also said that it is not the workers' fault that reckless political leadership and spending has dried the coffers and he called on government to lead by example. "Anyone criticizing wage demands is being very cruel to the Zimbabwean worker."

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Piecing Together the Mosaic of Labor Laws  
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¶15. (SBU) In addition to these economic challenges, a confusing web of inconsistent laws has restricted workers' rights. Kanyenze explained that labor laws have been amended so many times that they contradict other laws and international labor standards. He described a "balkanization" of the labor market and labor laws. For instance, to avoid paying steep income taxes on foreign currency salaries, NGOs and others have resorted to quietly

providing employees with food baskets and other side benefits, leading to inconsistent pay scales and conditions of employment for similar types of work.

¶16. (SBU) A notable problem with labor laws is that civil servants are not covered by protections granted in the Labor Act. Their activities are governed by the Public Service Act, which does not recognize the collective bargaining rights of public employees. Private sector employees, by contrast, benefit from National Employment Councils and sector-specific tripartite negotiating committees that set down wages and benefits through a discussion amongst labor, business, and government representatives. Kanyenze said that the International Labor Organization has called on Zimbabwe to harmonize its laws to ensure all workers are afforded the right to organize and associate with a union. The unity government, however, may have inadvertently detracted from that effort, according to Kanyenze. By creating new

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ministries to satisfy both political parties, there are now two ministries that share responsibility for workers. The Labor Ministry is responsible for private sector workers while the Ministry of Public Service is responsible for civil servants. Both are led by MDC officials. Regarding labor legislation, parastatal employees are technically supposed to be governed under the Labor Act, but employers often use the Public Service Act in negotiations. These legal inconsistencies almost always benefit the employer rather than the employee. Kanyenze said there is a desperate need for a national policy framework.

¶17. (SBU) Additionally, legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), and the Criminal Act are often invoked to curtail union freedoms. Despite a special labor court to handle labor matters, the system is seriously backlogged and delays of several years are commonplace.

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Many, Many Ministries Angling for Action  
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¶18. (SBU) Kanyenze went on to list ministries attempting to play a role in labor and economic recovery -- or to take credit in case of recovery -- including the Ministries of Youth, Small and Medium Enterprises, Labor, Public Service, and Education. He said that Youth Minister Saviour Kasukuwere of ZANU-PF had contacted him to request a copy of Kanyenze's assessment on how to rebuild labor markets in Zimbabwe, even though that report would be more appropriately handled by the Labor or Finance ministry. As ministers elbow each other for a role in the government, Kanyenze fears a lack of coherent vision will impede real progress.

¶19. (SBU) The new Labor Minister, Paurina Gwanyanya, has been widely described as a competent and impressive leader. She comes from the labor movement, previously led the parliamentary labor committee and served on the SADC parliamentary forum. Kanyenze and others believe she will surround herself with sound advisors and make evidence-based decisions. Her Permanent Secretary, however, is mistrusted by those in the labor movement. According to Kanyenze, the Labor Ministry is "infested" with intelligence operatives who have long spied on the ZCTU and will need to be weeded out over time. Chibebe told us on March 25 that while Gwanyanya is astute on labor issues, he questions whether she will be able to separate herself from her background in union politics. He said it was "unfortunate" that she had been given that post, and repeated Kanyenze's concerns that the ministry is rife with ZANU-PF supporters.

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ZFTU Playing Lead Role in Farm Invasions  
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¶20. (SBU) Although lacking legitimate membership, ZFTU has managed to have a negative impact on labor in some sectors. Qmanaged to have a negative impact on labor in some sectors. In most industries, workers can readily distinguish between the ZFTU and ZCTU affiliate. However, in agriculture, ZFTU has taken advantage of workers' lack of access to information and coerced them into ZFTU membership. A ZCTU affiliate, the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) has long represented agricultural workers on commercial farms. However harassment, political violence and forced displacement have eroded GAPWUZ's membership to 27,000 members, down from 50,000 just a year ago. This has partly been accomplished by three ZFTU affiliates, including the deceptively named group Horticulture and General Agriculture

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and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (HGAPWUZ), whose representatives routinely arrive on commercial farms claiming to represent the needs of farm workers. (NOTE: ZFTU affiliate HGAPWUZ uses its nearly identical name to easily deceive farm workers into believing its "representatives" are from the legitimate GAPWUZ union. ZFTU affiliates in other sectors have adopted similar names to their legitimate ZCTU counterparts in an effort to confuse workers. END NOTE.)

¶21. (SBU) GAPWUZ's General Secretary, Gertrude Hambira, told us on March 17 that her organization was suffering as a result of violence that disrupted commercial farm operations during last year's contested elections as well as the recent upsurge in farm invasions that began in early February (Ref C). She explained that when farms are invaded by new owners bearing offer letters ordering the existing owner to vacate the property, typically the new owners will dismiss the vast majority of workers as well. She cited a recent example in the Chegutu area of Mashonaland West where 400 workers were just evicted from a citrus farm by its new owner, Edna Mazongwe, President of the Senate.

¶22. (SBU) Additionally, under the Labor Act, the employer must pay a severance package to all workers. Some evicted white farmers have honored these agreements and paid these packages despite losing their farms. In some of these instances, HGAPWUZ representatives then extort half of that severance package from the displaced workers, calling it a "consultation fee." When GAPWUZ brought these occurrences to the attention of police in nearby Kadoma, they responded that they couldn't take up the allegations because it was political.

¶23. (SBU) GAPWUZ is also in decline because the new farmers -- those few who actually engage in some farming activity -- actively discourage union membership. These farmers refuse to subtract and send union membership fees from their employees' paychecks. In fact, ZFTU and HGAPWUZ have been notorious for harassing employees of private businesses (not just farm workers) and demanding physical collections of membership dues. Many workers feel compelled to join to avoid reprisals associated with being labeled as part of the MDC.

¶24. (SBU) Hambira went on to explain how the land reform program altered the negotiating landscape. Formerly, GAPWUZ would negotiate wages with the Commercial Farmer's Union (CFU). Now the CFU has largely been replaced by the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmer's Union (ZCFU) that represents the interests of the new farmers who were awarded or seized formerly white-owned farms. Hambira said that shift has also hurt farm workers, as wages and working conditions have worsened under ZCFU management. She also reported that the government had allowed uninvited parties, including CIO operatives, to sit in on negotiations. As a result, farm Qoperatives, to sit in on negotiations. As a result, farm worker wages have suffered. Currently, negotiated wages allow for the lowest paid agriculture worker to receive US\$10 and a food basket each month.

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COMMENT  
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¶25. (SBU) The once-powerful Zimbabwean labor movement has been sharply weakened during the past few years by economic collapse and rapidly rising unemployment. Shrinking productivity, hyperinflation and dollarization have whittled down union dues, eroded the membership base, and undermined ZCTU's and its affiliates' ability to effectively protect and

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advance worker rights. Apart from economic challenges, a second front has been opened by ZANU-PF "splinter unions" that are determined to weaken genuine labor movements and promote ZANU-PF policies and propaganda. These factors combine to threaten the future of organized labor in Zimbabwe.

¶26. (SBU) MDC leadership in key ministries such as Labor, Education, and Public Service has been welcomed by the unions. However, the MDC is constrained by resources and, thus far, has been unable to satisfy salary demands from labor groups, even in priority areas such as public education. This has led to growing dissatisfaction with the new government, and more importantly, a growing belief that while certainly more sympathetic, the MDC may be no more able to deliver worker benefits than ZANU-PF. END COMMENT.

MCCEE